

Position paper

INTERREG SOUTH BALTIC PROGRAMME 2021-2027 ARGUMENTS SUPPORTING A NEW PROGRAMME

Prepared on 23rd March 2020

With reference to:

- the Position Paper of Euroregion Baltic on the Future of the Interreg South Baltic Programme after 2020, adopted on 16th October 2019;
- the orientation paper from the European Commission on “Cross-Border Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Area”, adopted 31st January 2020.

The regions of the South Baltic programme area take the following position:

1. **We support the continuation of the South Baltic Programme as a separate European Territorial Cooperation instrument.** Long-term result orientation on an interregional level demands continuity, a strong vision and a strategy. The priorities and networks of the previous programmes are established among stakeholders within our common functional area. This provides stability, trust and a strong foundation for further development, knowledge exchange and joint implementation of actions.
2. **We strongly oppose the European Commission’s proposal to merge the South Baltic Programme with the Central Baltic Programme.** We believe that the merger of the South Baltic Programme and Central Baltic Programme would result in creating another, in fact, transnationally oriented programme, as eight countries and a vast geographical area would be involved in this cooperation. From our perspective, this would no longer be a cross-border programme in real terms. Mitigating between more than 50 regions and their development strategies would put the priority setting process at risk and make the new programme less effective in addressing the specific cross-border needs of the South Baltic area.
3. **We support the idea of bringing the EU closer to its citizens.** We firmly believe that the South Baltic Programme needs to keep its cross-border character, and in result be able to come much closer to and involve the citizens at mostly local and regional level.

4. The statement of Cross-border Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Area Orientation Paper that “central part of the Baltic Sea area there are two maritime CBC programmes, Central Baltic (FI, SE, EE, LV) and South Baltic (SE, LT, PL, DE, DK), which cover, to a large extent, areas with comparable characteristics” reflects real life situation only to a very limited extent. In fact, both programmes cover fundamentally different regions.

Central Baltic area with capitals and their metropolitan areas (Helsinki, Riga, Stockholm, Tallinn), having immense economic and academic potentials, differs from the South Baltic programme area, composed of less developed (e.g. western Lithuanian, northern Polish, and north-eastern German regions, falling under the definition of Cohesion regions) or less accessible regions. Their development needs a different approach.

5. We believe that merging the two programmes will weaken the primary goal, which should be to address citizens needs in the most direct way possible. This could also disconnect significant players in the South Baltic area – such as local authorities, smaller universities and university colleges and NGO’s.

Our experience has shown that local communities and institutions are more willing to engage in the cooperation on the cross-border level than on a transnational level. Until now the South Baltic programme has been a natural choice of “newcomers” to cross-border cooperation. There is still a need for actions to strengthen the capacity and possibilities for unexperienced and smaller stakeholders to start international cooperation.

6. The need for functional cross-border cooperation is evident in the South Baltic area when matching socio-economic and environmental challenges, faced by regions in peripheral and rural areas with common sea borders. The South Baltic Programme is more than a maritime-oriented programme, hence focus on sustainable regional growth, innovative actions and capacity building, as well as on sustainable transport, tourism, and a clean, healthy Baltic Sea, has been crucial for the Programme and we believe that this wider approach needs to be continued.
7. The cross-border programme cooperation has been one of the most important tools to strengthen the local and regional stakeholders’ possibility to implement what is jointly agreed in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

A success factor has been that the joint project actions taken have had a profound base in the regional development challenges, which have made it possible for local and regional authorities to tackle local problems from a cross-border perspective with multiplied results and impact.

Additionally, the regional political leaders’ involvement in the programme has resulted in projects and activities where cross-border added value has been strongly anchored and connected to the regional strategic development.

8. Finally, the strong political collaboration established for over 20 years within Euroregion Baltic and Euroregion Pomerania proves that the cross-border cooperation in the South Baltic sea area, despite the differences, indeed is a functional cooperation with a joint vision and a strategy sharing several similar challenges.

On behalf of the South Baltic regions,

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